

Face it, Facebook is here to stay, despite all the crazy, dumb and dangerous ways people use it to harm themselves and others every day. The young girl who posts too much information to the predator lurking behind the screen. The soccer mom who thinks her secret pictures are only visible to some of her “friends.” The officer who posts to many details about the scoundrel he apprehended that night. Or the teen who attempts suicide because of the barrage of verbal threats and bullying posted by other students.

But wait. There is another side to the phenomenon known as Facebook — and when tapped in a positive, proactive way, it can provide a wealth of information to law enforcement agencies and keep them better connected to their communities.

In August, Trigg County Sheriff Ray Burnam was faced with a dilemma. After a local resident took Burnam’s suggestion to install deer cameras around his property as a cheaper, better alternative to most home-alarm camera systems, the resident walked into the sheriff’s office with an SD card in hand from the camera and \$3,000 worth of missing equipment. Burnam loaded the card into the computer and the crisp, clear video they viewed showed them exactly who their suspect was — the only problem was neither Burnam nor the resident recognized the individual.

“The picture was clear as day; he was tattooed,” Burnam said. “I didn’t know who it was and no one in my office knew.”

So, Burnam turned to Facebook. He posted images from the video on the Trigg County Sheriff’s Office Facebook page asking if anybody could identify the suspect — and immediately calls began pouring in.

“They told us who he was, where he worked, what he drove and where he lived,” Burnam said. “Within an hour, we were at his house. We showed him the pictures in the interview and there was nothing else he could say except, ‘Yeah, that’s me.’”

Using Facebook to his advantage as an information gathering tool is nothing new for Burnam, who announced his run for sheriff on Facebook last year. Prior to taking office in January, Burnam was a flight chief at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois, where he mentored young airmen new to the base.

“Facebook was a way for me to look up on the airmen ... they just pour their lives



▲ Sheriff Ray Burnam started the Trigg County Sheriff's Office Facebook page shortly after taking office in January. Burnam placed the above surveillance video images on the agency's Facebook page and within one hour captured the suspect seen in the footage.



▲ The Bardstown Police Department posts images of the city and county's most wanted individuals on the agency's Facebook page. Chief Rick McCubbin said that about 25 percent of the warrants served in the area are helped by tips from Facebook.

out on there,” Burnam said. “It was a good tool to use there to help young men and women.

“After I was elected, I used Facebook as a way to communicate,” he continued. “We build rapport. I get messages daily of activity going on in my community.”

And it is that rapport building with community members through Facebook

that allows Kentucky agencies to be successful obtaining useful information from community members when they are searching for suspects, looking to serve warrants or trying to identify individuals from surveillance videos.

“We’re a small town and we have limited resources,” Burnam said. “You use what you have available to you, and Facebook is free.” >>